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Scott Mullin/For Hearst Connecticut Newspapers

Focus shifts to gun violence

U.S. attorney general: Holder visits with Newtown first responders as officials shape response to last week's massacre



Ned Gerard/Staff photographer

Above, a woman consoles a child after the funeral service for Jesse McCord Lewis at the Honan Funeral Home in Newtown. Inset, mourners pass a table of photographs at the memorial service for school teacher Lauren Rousseau at the First Congregational Church in Danbury.

By Tom Cleary
and Gary Martin

National revulsion over the slaughter of innocents in Newtown a week ago Friday morning had top federal officials from the White House to the Justice Department focused Thursday on gun violence and what can be done to prevent the next bloodbath.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder met with first responders in Newtown following a meeting earlier in the day with Vice President Joe Biden and other law enforcement officials about a meaningful response to last week's massacre, which left 20 children and six educators dead.

Holder did not appear publicly and the feds did not release details of his visit. His motorcade could be seen leaving an area near the Sandy Hook Elementary School building around 7:20 p.m.

See Holder on A4

Inside

» **Saying goodbye:** Funerals held Thursday for two educators, four children. **A2-3**

» **Neighbor speaks:** Gene Rosen came home last Friday and found sobbing first-graders. **A5**

» **Paying tribute:** Athletes, teams honor Newtown. **Sports**

PETIT SPEAKS OUT

'The hole in your heart never goes away'

By Neil Vigdor

Dr. William Petit Jr. has been in the crucible of suffering left in the wake of violence.

The lone survivor of the deadly 2007 Cheshire home invasion, a crime so heinous it garnered international headlines and framed the debate over the future of capital punishment in Connecticut, Petit qualifies as more than an empathetic figure in the wake of the



Autumn Driscoll/Staff photographer

Dr. William Petit Jr. survived a 2007 Cheshire home invasion that took the lives of his wife and two daughters.

Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre.
Petit's wife, Jennifer Hawke-

Petit, 48, and daughters, Hayley, 17, and Michaela, 11, were left to die
See Petit on A2

FATHER OF SLAIN SANDY HOOK TEACHER
SAID SHE LACKED KEY TO THE CLASSROOM

Shootings traumatize Newtown teachers

By Nanci G. Hutson
and Robert Miller

NEWTOWN — Teachers in Sandy Hook Elementary School and elsewhere in the district are grappling with emotional trauma in the wake of last week's mass shooting, the town's superintendent said Thursday.

"We are educators. We are not accustomed to doing combat," Newtown Schools Superintendent Janet Robinson said, "and we want to help people through it the best we can. This is more than

grieving; this is post-traumatic stress. And it's not going to be over tomorrow."

The school district is providing counseling through Newtown Youth and Family Services and its Sandy Hook office will be open through the weekend and Christmas week. Kids In Crisis counselors also are available at the family services' office, including on Christmas Day.

Newtown Education Federation President Tom Kuroski said he is in awe of district teachers,
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TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN

Mourners recall angels and artists

Mourners at Allison Wyatt's funeral were asked to learn from her kindness and exuberance. A line of officers on horseback joined the motorcade for the funeral of Jesse Lewis.

A little boy wonders how he will be sure he is on the right school bus

without his friend Catherine Hubbard. New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan compares the life of Anne Marie McGowan Murphy to that of Jesus. Benjamin Andrew Wheeler was remembered as a ram-bunctious Tiger Cub Scout who loved the Beatles

and lighthouses. Lauren G. Rousseau was remembered as an "angel" who touched many lives.

Mourners lined up outside houses of worship, quietly waiting their turn to say goodbye to victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings.



Mourners, including Scouts and Scout leaders, leave the building after the funeral for Benjamin Andrew Wheeler at Trinity Episcopal Church in Newtown on Thursday.

JESSE LEWIS, 6

'Little cowboy' loved horses

By Ana Ley

NEWTOWN — A line of officers on horseback joined the motorcade for the funeral of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis, a "little cowboy" who loved horses and was known by family friends for his smiling face and cheery demeanor.

"There shouldn't be a reason for a coffin that small," family friend Amanda Carroll said, as she shivered and sobbed outside Honan Funeral Home early Thursday, during the boy's wake. "It's really, just, horrible."

Carroll and her friend, Erin Keaney, were among more than 500 people who gathered for the wake, which marked the beginning of a procession of six services Thursday for the victims of last week's shooting rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Clad in green and white — Sandy Hook's school colors — Carroll and Keaney said



Jesse loved to play with the fake horses at their Western-themed sports bar and restaurant, the Coyote Maverick

"If you just go to a normal funeral ... this is worse," Carroll said, noting that there were toys inside the funeral home. "Everything is smaller, and you just can't even imagine."

But there is an outpouring of support in the tight-knit town, which may be helping families like Jesse's cope, Carroll said. Makeshift memorials line Newtown's Main Street, and flowers, toys and other offerings are piled over benches in front of Edmond Town Hall.

"It's amazing, the fact that everyone's together right now," Carroll said. "You could not find more support."

Thomas Skrelja, 13, who goes to school with Jesse's big brother JT, said Jesse was JT's best cheerleader, always eager to watch him play soccer with other kids from school.

CATHERINE HUBBARD, 6

Charming girl who loved animals

By Kristen V. Brown

NEWTOWN — The stuffed animals piled on the church lawn paid tribute to a red-haired 6-year-old whose first request to Santa was for a pair of fish and who had asked him to bring her pets every Christmas since.

Pink flowers lining the back of the church and the pink vestments worn by the priest honored her favorite color.

And her tiny, white coffin symbolized Newtown's ongoing agony as it buries the littlest victims of last week's rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Yet on Thursday morning, the friends, classmates and loved ones of Catherine Hubbard found joy as they recalled the loving, spirited girl who had a way of charming



those around her.

In a composed eulogy that capped a pink-hued funeral Mass at St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church, Jennifer Hubbard told the packed crowd that her daughter and her son had been best friends. Though Frederick was older, she said, it was Catherine who always made sure he was on the right bus for school. Now, the boy wonders who will make sure he gets on the right bus.

Later, the Rev. Luke Suarez, who wore a robe of Catherine's favorite pink, told Frederick that whenever he missed his sister he could just look up and she would wink back.

The boy announced to the crowd that his sister already had.

"She got up there fast," Suarez said, and, for a brief moment, laughter surged through the church.



Joshua Trujillo/Staff photographer

Mourners look at a portrait of Benjamin Andrew Wheeler on display during the funeral for the six-year-old at Trinity Episcopal Church in Newtown on Thursday.

ALLISON WYATT, 6

Young artist, quick to smile and to share

By Amanda Cuda

Allison "Allie" Wyatt was a vibrant, funny 6-year-old girl. She was a budding artist who covered her family's home in her paintings and drawings. She was the kind of child who smiled easily and wouldn't hesitate to share her Goldfish crackers with a stranger. That's how Allie, one of 20 children killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings, was remembered at her funeral at Sacred Heart Church in Southbury.

"You are a very fortunate group," said the Rev. Walter L. Pitman, who led the service. "At some point over the past six years, Allie Wyatt got in your way and you are better for it."

No family or friends spoke at the service, attended by several hundred people. It was only Pitman, who is actually a senior pastor at another church in Southbury.

He said he didn't know the Wyatt family before last week's tragedy, but has spent some time over the past few days getting to know them and their beloved Allie.

"She was goofy," Pitman said. "She was funny. She had her two grandfathers wrapped around her finger and she knew it." Allie loved to read, often digging through



bags of books. She loved math. "That alone makes her a saint," he said.

Pitman said the little girl wanted to be a teacher and worked toward that goal by teaching her sister Lauren to ride the bus. She was, like most children, naturally inquisitive.

"There wasn't a simple answer for Allie," Pitman said. "You couldn't just answer a question with 'because.' The next words out of her mouth would be 'Why?'"

She was also naturally kind, the sort of kids who could coerce a total stranger to take one of her Goldfish crackers with a simple smile. "Allie didn't need to be prompted to be thoughtful and nice," Pitman said.

Many of the mourners filing into the church wore green ribbons, which have become a symbol of support for the victims. Not far from the church, a large green ribbon was hung on a gazebo, and trees were adorned with green ribbons as well.

Near the end of his service, Pitman encouraged all those present to learn from Allie's kindness and exuberance. "Live your life the way she lived hers," he said. "Be funny. Be goofy. Be silly. Greet each day with fun and a sense of adventure. And, whenever possible, share your Goldfish with a stranger."

Petit: 'The hole in your heart never goes away'

Continued from A1

in their burning home after being sexually assaulted and doused with gasoline by their captors, who are on death row.

In an interview with Hearst Connecticut Newspapers, his first since the school shootings last Friday, Petit, 56, commiserated with victims' families and their anguish.

"I would tell them if I was sitting in front of them that the hurt and the hole in your heart never goes away and you adjust to it," Petit said by telephone.

Petit agreed to share his story with the hope it might help some of the families of the 20 children and six adults killed at the school, saying he is open to talking to them.

"You think the same thing

hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands and thousands, of times," Petit said. "It's there all the time."

Petit, who remarried four months ago and now lives near Hartford in Burlington, was returning from a visit with his parents Friday when his sister broke the news about the school shooting by phone.

"It was just an awful, sinking feeling," Petit said. "I almost couldn't make it home. I was crying in the car and broke down."

A well-known endocrinologist at the time of the home invasion, Petit was beaten with a baseball bat and tied up in his basement by Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky, who tracked Petit's wife and youngest daughter from the parking lot of a local

supermarket.

Petit said it's natural to question one's faith after such a traumatic experience.

"The first thing is you're angry with God," Petit said. "It's OK to be angry with God."

Since his world was turned upside-down, Petit said he has tried to focus on the memories of his wife and daughters.

"I think you feel best when you're thinking positive thoughts about your loved ones and about the good times," Petit said.

He established the Petit Family Foundation to promote science education for young women and help victims of violence and people with chronic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, which his wife had. Last year, petitfamilyfoundation.org disbursed \$260,000 in grants,

with \$100,000 going to build a health lodge at the Channel 3 Kids Camp in Andover, Petit said.

Petit avoids allowing himself to become consumed by anger.

"That's nothing that you invite because it usually takes you to a dark place," he said.

He also emphasized he doesn't have all the answers for the victims' families about grieving.

"I would tell them you have to do it in your own time," Petit said.

Petit strongly recommends the families seek professional counseling, saying family and friends are not an adequate substitute.

"It's really not a badge of honor to try to tough things out," he said. "Your friends need to be your friends. Your spouse needs to be your spouse."

Petit also offered advice for

well-meaning friends of the victims' families.

"Just being with people is important," he said. "I think it's important to know that you don't have the answer. The little hug. The little bit of food. When people would share memories or a photo or an anecdote."

Having a year-round support network is critical, according to Petit, who said holidays such as Christmas and birthdays are particularly difficult times.

Petit acknowledged the outpouring of support can also be overwhelming.

"From my perspective, most of the people in Newtown need time and space," he said.

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TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN



Scott Mullin/For Hearst Connecticut Newspapers

Mourners attend the memorial service for Sandy Hook Elementary School teacher Lauren Rousseau, at the First Congregational Church in Danbury on Thursday,

ANNE MARIE MURPHY, 52 Cardinal praises teacher for her sacrifice

By Stewart Powell

KATONAH, N.Y. — With New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan leading the way, the tearful, quaking family and hometown of Anne Marie McGowan Murphy bid a wrenching farewell Thursday to the slain 52-year-old special education teacher who died at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown last Friday trying to protect 6-year-old Dylan Hockley from gunfire.

Dolan underscored her sacrifice. “Like Jesus, Annie laid down her life for her friends. Like Jesus, Annie’s life and death brings light, truth, goodness and love to a world often shrouded in darkness, evil, selfishness and death,” the cardinal said.

Murphy’s husband, Michael, told the couple’s four adult children and a standing-room-only congregation in St. Mary of the Assumption Church that his wife of 30 years had been true to herself in trying to defend the defenseless.

Dylan and the 19 other 6- and 7-year-olds who died at the hands Adam Lanza did not die alone, her grieving husband told about 300 people packed into the white clapboard church in the center of this New York City bedroom community. She was there with them, he emphasized.

Murphy was one of six teachers and 20 first-graders murdered when the heavily armed gunman broke into the Sandy Hook Elementary School on Friday and started firing a semi-automatic assault weapon into screaming children.



Police said Murphy’s body was found shielding the special education student that she had worked with one-on-one.

Murphy had lived in Sandy Hook for the past 14 years.

Dolan, wearing the red cap and carrying the staff of his office, looked to soothe and inspire the red-eyed congregation, noting that Friday would be the shortest day of the year, with the longest night ahead — before the dawn brings lengthening days of light. Murphy, the archbishop said, was in the light of heaven that awaited the Christian faithful.

There were light-hearted moments, such as when Dolan noted that scores of McGowans were present. Anne Marie McGowan had attended local parochial schools before going on to Southern Connecticut State University for a master’s degree in education.

“Anyone here Irish?” Dolan asked. The congregation broke into laughter. Many mourners had spent the minutes before the service catching up on the comings and goings of various extended family members in a clan that brought far-flung cousins together for the first time in years.

Mourners included staffers from the elementary school where Murphy died. A woman in her 40s, with a Sandy Hook elementary school staffer badge attached to her purse, told her teenage son and daughter the service had been harder than she expected. “I can’t believe I will go to work and she won’t be there,” the woman said, bent in grief. “I saw her every day.”

BENJAMIN A. WHEELER, 6 Young Scout inspired his family

By Gary R. Martin

NEWTOWN — Benjamin Andrew Wheeler was remembered by family and friends Thursday at a packed funeral service here as a rambunctious Tiger Cub Scout who loved the Beatles and lighthouses.

Wheeler, 6, was an inspiration to his parents, who thanked members of the community and Trinity Episcopal Church “who cared for him in that ‘wipe that nose kinda way.’”

Two congregants, Mary Birdsong and Kimberly Ann Evans, sang the Beatles song, “Here Comes the Sun,” to tearful eyes and drawn faces in the wooden pews and along the church walls.

Wheeler’s life was taken in the unfathomable tragedy last week at Sandy Hook Elementary School that stunned the nation.

“This has been a time that none of us have lived through before. It is inexplicable in human terms,” the Rev. Kathleen Adams-Shepherd told an overflow crowd at the church that included Gov. Dannel P. Malloy.

She remembered Wheeler as a boy with inexhaustible energy, and gathered children in the church at the railing before the altar to hand out lighthouse-shaped Christmas ornaments as a remembrance.

The reverend told the congregation that



Wheeler’s life was cut too short by a “sick young man with access to weapons that should never, ever be in a home.”

Born in New York, Wheeler was growing up in Connecticut where he attended Sandy Hook Elementary School and was active in Scout Den

6. Scout leaders from Connecticut and New York attended the funeral for Wheeler, one of two Scouts killed in the shooting last week. A funeral for Jack Pinto, 6, was held Monday.

The Scout leaders, holding banners, stood stoically, lining the front entrance of the church.

Those attending the funeral openly wept throughout the service, held in the stone structure erected in 1870.

An overflow of people stood on the lawn outside. Across the street was a throng of media and cameras.

A private burial followed.

A large number of relatives were joined by friends of the family as they shared their grief on a day when five memorial services were held for victims of the massacre.

“Gracious God, we come before you this day in pain and sorrow,” Adams-Shepherd said. “We grieve the loss of Benjamin, a precious human life.”



Lindsay Niegelberg/Staff photographer

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan comforts mourners as he leaves St. Mary of the Assumption Roman Catholic Church in Katonah, N.Y., after the funeral for Sandy Hook Elementary School special education teacher Anne Marie Murphy on Thursday.

LAUREN G. ROUSSEAU, 30 An ‘angel’ who touched many lives

By Richard A. Marini

DANBURY — Lauren Gabrielle Rousseau lived “a life that was all too short but that touched so many,” the Rev. Pat Kriss told an overflow crowd at First Congregational Church on Thursday.

Friends repeatedly used the word “angel” in remembering Rousseau, 30, a teacher and victim of last week’s mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in nearby Newtown. They called her “an angel here on Earth,” recalled the angel smiley-face she used when sending instant messages, and took comfort in the thought of her in fully grown angel wings, “so you can fly your little ones to heaven.”

“Thank you, Lauren, for being a faithful, thoughtful, ridiculously fun friend,” said one.

The mourners took more than an hour to file into the historic church, with many of them stopping to greet, hug and cry with family members. They lined the back of the



church and others listened through the doors outside.

The 45-minute service began with the song “Jesus Loves the Little Children,” a poignant recognition of the 20 children slain at the school where Rousseau had only recently begun teaching.

A family friend, Rick Cipot, read several scriptures, including Psalms 23.

Rousseau’s boyfriend, Tony Lusardi III, joined friends from her early childhood through her college days at the University of Connecticut in recalling her as a diligent worker whose smile made even the hardest task easier.

Afterward, the Rev. Jennifer Gingras, senior pastor at Monroe Congregational Church, remembered Rousseau from the many summers she volunteered at the church’s annual Strawberry Festival.

“We’re all just feeling so emotional,” she said. “I hope everybody can just feel peace and love. In difficult times like these, love is the answer.”

TRAGEDY IN NEWTOWN

Holder visits Newtown first responders

Continued from A1

Local officials said Holder first met with police officers, firefighters and EMTs at the Sandy Hook Volunteer Fire House, where last Friday agonized family members of the school's staff and students waited to learn the grim fate of their loved ones.

Before his trip to Connecticut, Holder was one of several Cabinet members who met with Biden after President Barack Obama tapped him to lead a task force on gun violence following the shooting rampage.

The president, who made an emotional visit to this shattered but resolute community Sunday night, told the vice president he wanted the panel to deliver concrete proposals that would make a real difference.

"The president is absolutely committed to keeping his promise that we will act," Biden told reporters in Washington. "Even if, as he says, we can only save one life, we have to take action."

State Police are still investigating the deadly attack carried out by Adam Lanza, 20, who murdered his mother before the bloodbath at the elementary school before killing himself as police closed in.

Lt. J. Paul Vance, who was among those who met with Holder, released no new information about the probe. It could take as many

as six months before the official report on the shooting is released, Vance said.

Funerals were held Thursday for two school staff members, teacher Lauren Rousseau and paraprofessional Anne Marie Murphy, and four students, Jesse Lewis, Catherine Hubbard, Benjamin Wheeler and Allison Wyatt.

Meanwhile, Nancy Lanza was buried in an undisclosed location in her native state of New Hampshire after a small, private ceremony there.

Kingston Police Chief Donald Briggs said about 25 family members attended the ceremony in the small town where Lanza once lived — and first learned to handle firearms.

Nancy Lanza — who pals described as a survivalist obsessed with the possibility of a pending worldwide economic collapse — later amassed a deadly arsenal that included the semi-automatic Bushmaster assault rifle used in the killings and powerful Glock and Sig Sauer handguns among other guns.

Holder was joined in the meeting by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius at the meeting.

Biden said he would reach out to all the stakeholders in the debate.

In announcing the task force, Obama instructed Biden to deal not only with new gun laws, but also asked the panel to look into mental health and cultural issues.

Biden convened the task force's first working group since the Newtown shootings by noting his involvement in writing the 1994 crime bill, which banned military-style assault weapons and strengthened federal gun licensing requirements.

"We have to have a comprehensive way in which to respond to the mass murder of our children that we saw in Connecticut," Biden said.

The National Rifle Association, an advocate for gun rights, has scheduled a news conference in Washington for today.

Thursday night, as the investigation continued, federal agents raided a gun shop in East Windsor where Nancy Lanza bought one of the guns used in the shooting.

WFSB Eyewitness News reported the shop has had issues with theft. On Saturday, a South Windsor man was arrested after police said they learned he stole a AR-15 rifle, the same type of long-gun used by Adam Lanza, from the store, Riverview Gun Sales.

Police told WFSB the thief, Jordan Marsh, 26, of South Windsor, was planning a shooting spree similar to Lanza's. He also stole 11 guns from the same store last year,

police said.

In 2007, State Police found that more than 30 guns were missing from the Riverview inventory. Sources told WFSB that the store is known for its low prices, but it wasn't known why Nancy Lanza traveled more than 60 miles from her home to the store to buy the gun.

David LaGuercia, owner of the shop, issued a statement on Wednesday confirming he sold one gun to Nancy and that he's co-operating with authorities.

Lanza was carrying the two handguns and the Bushmaster, all legally purchased, when he carried out the second-deadliest school shooting in American history. Police said he had enough ammunition with him to kill every student in the school.

The victims of the shooting will be remembered today at 9:30 a.m. during a moment of silence. Churches around the country will ring 26 bells to honor the victims.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy requested the remembrance and signed a proclamation making Friday a "Day of Mourning."

More than 100,000 churches will participate in the bell ringing, while several governors have joined Malloy in calling for a moment of silence. The White House said Obama will also observe the moment of silence.

Malloy, Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman, Newtown First Selectman Pat Llo-

dra and other elected officials and residents plan to meet on the steps of Edmond Town Hall in Newtown for the moment of silence, as bells from the nearby Trinity Episcopal Church ring 26 times.

Also Friday, many video gamers around the country will put down their virtual weapons for a "day of online shooter cease fire."

The organizers of the event said they don't blame violent video games for the shooting, but said they are doing it to honor the victims.

Students won't be in school Friday in New Milford, about 20 miles north of Newtown. Classes were canceled for the entire school district as a result of multiple threats received in the days after the Sandy Hook shooting.

Police said there is no immediate danger to students, determining the rumors and threats were unsubstantiated. But the town's schools superintendent decided it was "in the best interest of the community" to cancel school, because of increased scrutiny on school safety after the Newtown massacre. Police recommended the cancellation.

Sgt. James Brady said Thursday evening that no arrests have been made in connection to any threats.

Staff writers Libor Jany, Dirk Perrefort, Eileen FitzGerald and The Associated Press contributed to this report.



Christian Abraham/Staff photographer

Eight-year-old Samantha DelGiudice, a third-grader at Sandy Hook Elementary School, thinks about where she want to place some flowers and a stuffed animal at a memorial for victims from last Friday's shooting massacre at the school Thursday in Newtown.

Newtown school district offers help to teachers

Continued from A1

and of how they have responded to "unspeakable circumstances."

On Thursday, Kuroski toured Newtown schools. Three days earlier, he addressed the district's more than 600 employees, including Sandy Hook faculty, and asked them to hold hands and feel their strength and unity.

"I want them to know how inspiring they are to all of us," Kuroski said.

Meanwhile, the father of Lauren Rousseau, a permanent substitute teacher killed in the Dec. 14 shootings, questioned whether his daughter was unable to lock her classroom door because she had not been given a key.

Gilles Rousseau said he raised the question after a contact with the school district, whom he did not identify, told him that Lauren Rousseau would not have had a key to lock the first-grade room where she was teaching Friday. As a permanent substitute, she was assigned to different classes from day to day.

Gunman Adam Lanza had shot his way into the school, shattering the front entrance door, killed Principal Dawn Hochsprung and school psychologist Mary Sherlach, then made his way down a hallway, law enforcement sources said.

According to published reports, the gunman went past the first classroom, whose

door was closed, and entered the room where Rousseau was teaching, killing her and 14 of her students.

He then went into a classroom of first-graders taught by Vicki Soto, killing Soto and six of her students, according to published accounts.

Shortly later, police rushed into the school and Lanza fatally shot himself.

It's unclear to what extent a locked door would have deterred Lanza. The high-powered, semiautomatic rifle he used would have been capable of blasting it open.

Furthermore, the proximity of Rousseau's first-grade classroom to the main entrance suggests that she — as apparently was the case with Soto — would have had little time to secure the room.

State Police and other investigators have yet to release their findings as they piece together the shooting spree.

Robinson, who was interviewed for this story prior to Gilles Rousseau's remarks, could not be reached again for comment. Gilles Rousseau acknowledged the speculative nature of his concerns.

"I'm not blaming anyone," he said. Teresa Rousseau, a copy editor at The News-Times who is the mother of Lauren Rousseau, said she is not focusing on the matter.

"What's done is done," she said. "And I have this hole in my heart."



Gilles Rousseau, father of Sandy Hook Elementary School teacher Lauren Rousseau, carries a photograph of his daughter after Thursday's memorial service at the First Congregational Church on Deer Hill Avenue in Danbury.

Scott Mullin/For Hearst Connecticut Newspapers

NEWS

‘THEIR FACES WERE FILLED WITH TERROR’

Schoolchildren ran to neighbor’s house

By Dirk Perrefort

NEWTOWN — Gene Rosen stopped at his home near Sandy Hook School to feed two cats in his care when he heard gunshots last Friday.

At first he discounted the repetitive shots as fireworks.

He went in his garage to feed the cats and when he came out he saw six children sitting in a circle on his front lawn.

“They were sitting very sweetly in a circle next to the lantern,” Rosen said, his eyes full of tears as he recounted the events of the morning of Dec. 14.

“But as I approached I realized they were crying, they were out of breath, their faces were filled with terror.”

The six first-graders somehow had escaped from Sandy Hook Elementary School as a gunman shot and killed 20 first graders and six educators.

They ran down Dickinson Drive and around the corner to Rosen’s house on Riverside Road, less than half a mile.

They had just seen their teacher die.

Rosen invited the children and a bus driver who was with them into the safety of his home. They followed quietly up the short hill to his small yellow house built in the 18th century — without objection.

Inside, Rosen grabbed a handful of his grandchildren’s stuffed toys and gave them to the children, who he said appeared to be comforted. One, Rosen said, began to spell her name out on a stuffed frog that had the alphabet on his belly.

They settled in the small



Michael Duffy/Staff photographer

Gene Rosen stands in his Newtown home and shows the spot where he first brought six children from neighboring Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday and gave them stuffed animals to comfort them.

living room with wide plank floors, two windows looking out at the driveway and a large hearth filled with family photos and a white tile hung with a single word, “Peace.”

Two of the boys sat on a rug in front of the couch, Rosen said, and suddenly they began to talk.

“Something changed,” Rosen said. “One boy started saying loudly, ‘we can’t go back to the school, we can’t go back to the school, our teacher is gone. Ms. Soto is gone.’”

The other boy joined in, “he had a little gun,” Rosen

recalled the boy saying, “and a big gun.”

A girl also began talking, she said she saw blood coming from Ms. Soto’s mouth, then the girl fell to the floor, Rosen said, and the narrative stopped.

It was only after Rosen heard on the news later that evening that first-grade teacher Vicky Soto had been killed, that he knew the story the children told was true.

Rosen began to cry.

“I knew they had witnessed the death of their teacher,” he said. “The children were so strong, so strong and so sweet.”

They were among an unknown number of students who fled the scene. Another small group was picked up by a mother who was heading to the school to deliver a gingerbread house.

The children with Rosen knew their phone numbers, but parents were not home. The bus driver called a supervisor and obtained emergency contacts for the parents and more calls were made.

Parents of four of the six children could be reached to learn their children were safe. They rushed to his house.

After reuniting the children with their parents, the group walked to the firehouse next door where students were being accounted for. The students, he said, filed into an empty bay.

“I know there was a room full of parents in that firehouse whose children had perished,” Rosen said, as he began to cry again. “Someone had to tell them they were gone.”

When he returned home, a weary Rosen sat on the couch, when a knock came on the front door.

“There was a woman,” he said. “Her face was frozen in

fear. She heard there were six children in the home and was hoping her son was among them.”

But the boy was among the 20 who were killed.

“I wanted to say he was here,” Rosen said as he held his face in his hands and sobbed. “I wanted to say he was here.”

“I saw that boy’s funeral pass my house the other day. I just want to put my arms around that woman and hug her.”

While Rosen is a retired psychiatrist who worked at the now closed Fairfield Hills hospital, he said it was the time he spent with his two grandchildren that prepared him for that horrible day.

“These are my teachers,” he said, pulling a picture of the two children from the mantel. “They gave me the strength to be with these children.”

After days of reflecting on the tragedy, Rosen said the strength and innocence of the children continues to stand out.

“I want the world to know that the goodness of these children, their strength and their innocence, can lead us to a civil discourse,” he said. “They know the answers, they know the truth.”

As Sandy Hook continues to heal, Rosen said he hopes that someday he can have a reunion with the children, and take them sledding on the hill in his backyard once there’s snow.

“These children are always in my prayers,” he said. “I want to meet them in the light, because we came together in the darkness.”

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FUNERAL DETAILS

8 more victims to be laid to rest

STAFF REPORTS

The funerals for victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings continue.

The funeral for **Rachel D’Avino**, 29, will be held Friday at the Church of Nativity, East Street, Bethlehem, at 11 a.m. Burial will be at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Watertown. Friends may call at Woodbury Funeral Home of Munson-Lovetere, 2 School St., Woodbury, on Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m.

A memorial service for **Dylan Christopher Jack Hockley**, 6, will be held at 1 p.m. Friday at Walnut Hill Community Church at 156 Walnut Hill Road, Bethel.

Calling hours for **Josephine Grace Gay**, 7, will be Friday from 4 to 7 p.m. at St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church, 46 Church Hill Rd., Newtown. A Mass of Christian burial for will be held for Josephine Sunday at 11 a.m. at St. Rose of Lima Roman Catholic Church.

Burial will be private. **Emilie Parker’s** funeral is scheduled for Saturday in Ogden, Utah, where her family lived before they moved to Newtown earlier this year, according to the Standard-Examiner.

The service for the 6-year-old will be held at 10 a.m. at the Rock Cliff LDS Stake Center, 1000 Suncrest Drive. The viewing will take place Friday from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Myers Mortuary in Ogden.

A Homegoing Celebration for **Ana Grace Marquez-**

Greene will be held Saturday. Calling hours are from 10 a.m. to noon, with a service at noon at The First Cathedral at 1151 Blue Hills Ave., Bloomfield. Burial is private.

A memorial Mass for school psychologist **Mary J. Sherlach** will be Friday at 11 a.m. at St. Stephen Church at 6948 Main St., Trumbull. Burial will be private.

A memorial Mass for **Grace Audrey McDonnell** will be Friday at 11 a.m. at the St. Rose of Lima Church in 46 Church Hill Rd., Newtown.

A funeral Mass for **Olivia Rose Engel** will be Friday at 1 p.m. at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church at 46 Church Hill Road, Newtown.

SAYING GOODBYE TO JESSE



Ned Gerard/Staff photographer

The hearse carrying the body of **Jesse McCord Lewis** drives down Main Street in Newtown on Thursday. **Lewis** is one of 20 students killed in the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School last Friday.

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